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S E R M O N

On the Occasion of

HIS MAJESTY'S RECOVERY

From the INDISPOSITION, with which it pleased

ALMIGHTY GOD
TO AFFLICT HIM,

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

MANSFIELD,

On Thursday the 23d of April, 1789,

Being the Day appointed by His MAJESTY for

A General Thanksgiving to Almighty God.

By The Rev. CHARLES PLUMPTRE, M. A.
RECTOR OF TEVERSAL, NOTTS.

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To the Reader.

THE Preacher had not the least idea of printing the following discourse, till solicited to do it by many of his Hearers. In submission to their partial opinion of it, He ventures to make it public, not from any notion he himself entertains of its being entitled to so flattering a compliment.

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1881

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S E R M O N,

Preached APRIL 23, 1789,

PSALMS, LXVI. 7.

He ruleth by his Power for ever : His Eyes behold the nations.

THE chief advantage of Revelation lies in giving us worthy notions of God and of his providential Government of the Universe. The Heathen Philosophers were strangely at a loss whenever they undertook to account for the accidents of this world ; but the glorious light of God's Word hath discover'd to us more comfortable views, and we are taught that not only the immense universe consisting of Systems and Worlds was created, and is still governed by an omnipotent and omnipresent Being ; but that every individual part, and every inhabitant of each part is continually protected, supported, and governed by Him, even so that ^a *the very hairs of our head are all number'd, and not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our heavenly Father.*—What a comfortable consideration

a. Matth. x. 29. 30.

consideration is this, to a rational mind, in order to support the Spirits through the perplexities of this Life, to be convinced that not only the good things of the world are the gift of a powerful and just, of a wise and good Being; but that the evils thereof both natural and moral are no less permitted for the best, and wisest purposes! To this great Governor of the universe therefore we ought to look up at all times, both when we labour under distresses, (^b for *affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground;*) for He only can remove them: and also when we are blessed by the good things of life; for to Him solely is the Praise due, and the want of acknowledgment on our part is the blackest ingratitude. The obligation is the same whether we have been acted upon in the more sudden way of instantaneous miracle, or whether the contrivances of human agents have been suffer'd to take slow effect in obedience to the will of Heaven. The Powers given to man, and even to inanimate matter are the gift of God, and cease to exist at his word: and by these second causes God is wont to execute his Judgments upon Worlds, upon Nations, and upon Individuals.

“ From this notion of Providence may be given a plain and
 “ direct answer to that question of the prophane fatalist, *What is*
“ the Almigh’y, that we should serve him? and what profit shall we
“ have

b. Job v. 6.

c. Job xxi. 15. The author takes the liberty of expressing his own idea nearly in the apposite words of Dr. S. Clarke. Vol. 6. p. 317.

“ *have, if we pray unto him?* Indeed, if the course of nature
 “ and those things which we call second causes were independent
 “ upon Providence; there would be reason to ask, what benefit
 “ there could be either in Prayer or in Thanksgiving. But upon
 “ the principles already laid down, it is very plain that Prayer and
 “ Thanksgiving are as much due to God for whatever is brought
 “ about by natural means, as if He had done the thing by any
 “ other instruments instead of these, even by the most miraculous
 “ powers.”

It is almost unnecessary to point out to you the obvious connection between these observations, and the occasion of this our extraordinary assemblage. A short time since (I trust, I am doing justice to every one) we all labour'd under the deepest national distress, from our hearts lamenting over the most miserable condition of our King, and sympathizing most feelingly in the domestic agony of the Royal Family. With pious Zeal we offer'd up our Prayers to the King of Kings, acknowledging the merits of his Judgement upon us and his Power to remove it, and supplicating Him that, in compassion to us all, He would mercifully be pleased to withdraw from our afflicted Sovereign his heavenly visitation, and give His blessing to the human means used for his recovery. In gracious pity towards us, God hath been pleased to hearken to and accept our united Prayers: the calamity which had befallen us is mercifully removed from us: the art of man hath prosper'd beyond our most sanguine expectations: the best of Kings is restored to his loving Subjects: the Husband and the Father to his despairing

despairing Family.—To God therefore, the Disposer of all Events, the Governor of the World, everywhere present and seeing all things let us give the Praise, and offer up to Him the just tribute of Gratitude, Honor, and Adoration. *For He ruleth by His Power for ever: His Eyes behold the nations.*

On such an occasion so pregnant with good to these Realms, and so immediately interesting to himself, it highly becomes the piety of our Sovereign to call upon his People and to unite his own with their acknowledgments of God's mercy towards himself and us. In the first enthusiasm of Joy, the human heart is wont to break out in the less silent transports of mutual congratulation and festivity: but when the agitation of animal spirits hath subsided, religion should resume her place, and the throne of Heaven should be addressed with calm and rational thanksgiving. So it would reflect national disgrace upon us, were we to make our present felicity an occasion only of eating and drinking, and refuse our grateful acknowledgments to the Author of it. Indeed, such ingratitude would be sufficient to provoke the wrath of God: it would seem as if our hearts were as hard as the heart of Pharaoh; who, while the plagues inflicted upon him through Moses awaken'd his sensibility, besought the Prophet's intercession with his God, yet, when they were removed, forgot his promises, and hardened his heart still more against the Lord. On the contrary to see a nation from one end of it to another, from the thronged metropolis to the most remote corner of it, from the Sovereign to his poorest Subject, together with one voice praising God for an act of deliverance

ance not in extempory effusion and sudden starts of devotion; but with composed and mature reflection ascribing that to Him; which can be ascribed to no other Being in the universe: adding this to His past mercies towards this Land (How many very signal mercies we have before received from Him our national history will remind us,) and sending forth the joyful noise of Psalms and grateful Hallelujahs *d to the Rock of our Salvation, e in that He hath heard us and hath attended to the voice of our Prayer; that he hath not turned away our Prayer nor his Mercy from us*—this must be a pleasant sight to Angels and conscious Spirits, and acceptable to God Himself. This must be the most certain way to secure to ourselves a continuance of his Favour and to ensure it to future generations; for *f happy is that people whose God is the Lord.*

We are assembled therefore in this pious duty of thanksgiving, not on account of dear-bought successes by our fleets and armies, and doubtful victories in contests of doubtful equity, but in a cause of an unequivocal nature, in which we cannot but be unanimous and undivided: in a cause wherein we are interested as fellow-creatures, fellow-christians, and fellow-citizens. For whether or not we should recover to the throne of these Realms a King exemplarily Pious towards God, the first in promoting Virtue and Religion among us, ever attentive to the welfare and happiness of his Subjects, the encourager of every thing that has a tendency to

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aggrandize

d. Psal. lxxix. 26.

e. Ps. lxvi. 19.

f. Ps. cxliv. 15.

aggrandize and to adorn us, administering Justice with impartial sway, extending his mercy as far as the interest of Government will allow, and executing the just severity of the Laws with tenderness and unwilling sensibility:—whether he should continue actively to fill the eminent station to which his Ancestors were invited, or by unconscious and untimely resignation yield to the pressing necessity of the public:—whether He be suffer'd by the will of Heaven to govern us for a longer period, or be called prematurely from Earth to a better Kingdom—these things, I say, interest us deeply and undividedly; nor can the page of history exhibit a nation more unanimous in their Joy than this now is. Joy so universal from the Courtier to the meanest Cottager cannot proceed from any thing but undissembled and confidential Love; nor that Love be founded but in the perception of every social and civil happiness. From the motives of Love and Gratitude it behoves us moreover to petition the throne of God, that He would graciously vouchsafe to our Sovereign a perfect and continuous restoration of health and all worldly blessings: to the Queen and other Royal Relatives a blessed reversion of comfort and fearless security in his re-establishment: and to the nation at large, that we may live uninterruptedly under his Government, till it shall please the wise Disposer of all Events to take him to Himself; and then that we may resign ourselves patiently to His Holy will.

But let us not think that we have discharged our consciences towards God by our mere attendance on this solemnity, or joining however devoutly in the Service appointed for the occasion. The distance between God, who hath bestowed his mercy upon us, and ourselves, who have been so raised from a state of despondency is infinitely

infinitely great; and therefore He is not to be approached by delusive homage, by the service of the lips or occasional fits of devotion only. A grateful man is best known by his works as a tree is by its fruit. To what end can a God of infinite Goodness afflict a creature capable of thought and of a reasonable capacity? not merely to display his own Power surely. That were an argument of Tyranny. But the God who governs the universe is a Father unto creation, as a Father therefore He wills nothing so much as the welfare and happiness of his creatures: His laws are calculated to this great end: He hath invested all his works with peculiar properties or powers subservient to the purposes of preservation and order: He visiteth the worlds with Favour or affliction as is in the end most for their good. For every affliction therefore, which befalls us individually or nationally, we should endeavour to find out the cause. It may be sent us as a punishment for our Sins: it may be as a trial of our Love and Faith. For every blessing we should earnestly thank our heavenly Father, and endeavour to merit His goodness to us by returns of greater Love and more perfect obedience to His Laws. Have we provoked the most High to send that dreadful calamity upon us, which We have been deploring? alas! what have we not deserved at his hands!—are we already so much wiser and mended as to deserve the removal of that or any other affliction God might have laid upon us? our merits are yet infinitely below our Maker's mercy to us. It behoves us therefore diligently to examine and to amend our conduct, and *sin no more lest a worse thing come unto us.*

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The necessity for reformation of morals among us has long been lamented, and as long as iniquity abounds so long it behoves Rulers and Teachers to insist upon it, however tiresome the topic to prophane ears. Our Sovereign has long deplored the vices of his people; and one of his last acts, before it pleased our heavenly King to afflict us in his affliction, was the issuing of his royal proclamation to his Subjects to amend their lives. His first declarations, since by the same over-ruling Power he has been restored to his former health, were that he would continue his discouragement of wickedness and promote, as far as in him lay, the cause of Virtue and Religion. Times have been when the Monarch's favour might be had by acts of rebellion against God. In the present reign he is declared to be the best entitled to it, who dares to be eminently virtuous. Since then example in the first and greatest Personage in these realms has not been and, from such happy auspices we may be sure, will not be wanting in public and private Virtue; if we yet suffer greater and severer judgments, the cause must be sought for among ourselves. In social bodies each rank of men respectively looks up to its superior as a model. If therefore the very highest sets a bad example, all the inferior ones usually are bad. If, on the contrary, vice still continues prevalent among all the latter, while the former remains eminently good and earnest for reformation, their corruption must be great indeed. The higher ranks therefore among us, those who by riches and by offices of public trust stand highest in order, have peculiar obligations upon them to become patterns, in imitation of the Sovereign, in the public and private exercises of Religion, that so their subordinate ranks may continue the same zeal for God's Honor to the lowest,

Thus

Thus with God on our side and his protection assured to us by our obedience to his commands, we need not fear the hosts of enemies, either spiritual or human; for our Righteousness will be our bulwark and defence, more powerful than Swords and other implements of war.

But we are far from such security. That a becoming sense of Religion is wanting to us, we need only look into our churches on the day of Rest fixed by God's command for the worship of Himself. The vacant seats of the absent, and the irreverent and multiform inattention of many present will convince us of this melancholy truth. The almost total neglect of the Lord's Supper is lamentable and pregnant with evil. The scanty knowledge of God's holy Word and the scornful and contemptuous dereliction and resignation of it to those, whose profession doubtless requires their more critical examination of it: the unwillingness to admit in ordinary conversation a single syllable of God's dispensations towards us and of his Laws, for the sake of trifles or of worse: the exclusion of God's Holy name in a serious and devout manner, and the regardless abuse of it in the most horrid oaths and execration,—these mark a sad levity of thought, and deficiency of Religion disgraceful to the times. Nay, what is still more dismal and portentous of bad consequences, a strange corruption of ideas of right and wrong, or a wonderful perversion of language has lately overwhelmed us. The use of language is to talk of and represent things according to their nature and essence. Vice therefore ought to be spoken of with the abhorrence it deserves, and virtue receive its just approbation. On the contrary you may hear the greatest crimes

crimes spoken of not only with indifference but even with applause; and acts, declared by God Himself to be very sinful, lightly treated of, nay, even boasted of as highly creditable and meritorious. Thus the young Sinner is laughed out of the blushings of innocence, and rallied out of the first pains of a wounded conscience. Thus some Sins are mitigated into venial errors by the mild term of Imprudence: and others almost recommended to the young and thoughtless by the dangerous ones of Gallantry and Fashion. Thus too, tho' God hath declared that our Lives were originally His gift, and are still in His Power alone, we dare to take away our neighbour's by an act which God calls **MURDER**, and man—**HONOR**. Nay more, we presume even to dispose of our own Lives just when we please, and there are not wanting books of wicked Sophistry endeavouring to prove our independent power over our own existence here: and we all too well know that we almost to a proverb and byword stand guilty before God of the horrid crime of **SELF MURDER**. Not to swell the catalogue too far, I shall mention two things more which reflect national disgrace. One is the violation of the Marriage-bed so frequent in our days, that the great Councils of the nation have been annually almost for several years past applied to, in order to dissolve the matrimonial contract. The other is the immoderate fondness for **GAMING**, to the ruin of private fortunes and to the danger of the public revenue: to the destruction of domestic peace and to the desolation of innocent families: to the utter seclusion of all religious exercises and to the introduction of every baseness and wickedness, of oaths and blasphemous calling upon God, of drowning the senses in strong drink, of mistrust, of cheating, of envyings, of quarrelling, of homicide and of Self-murder,

murder. These together with the ordinary attendants on unbounded luxury mark the manners of many in the higher ranks, and like the waters of a flood are spreading rapidly over the lower and threaten to overwhelm the land; for many in the lower orders imitate those in the higher but too closely in principle, tho' circumscribed by their outward condition and circumstances from the glare of wickedness. Hence among the former are added the Sins more peculiar to Poverty, I mean Theft in all its Shapes from the covert and over-reaching tricks of cunning to the most daring and open Fraud. For they too have learnt to contemn Religion and all its Supports, among the rest the observation of the Sabbath: they have their jests against God and his Laws: they fear not to blaspheme his Holy name: they can find no deformity in vice, nor peculiar loveliness in virtue ^h *putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter* by a strange perversion of language and ideas: the false notions concerning honor them too pervade: they can see reason why men may rob God of the power over their own lives: they can invade the rights and happiness of families by Adultery: among them are whole-families brought into ruin and disgrace by the baneful influence of Gaming, the widowed wives lamenting the untimely end of self-slain husbands, and the orphan children regretting their Father's madness.

But why may we not as easily imitate the virtues of our Superiors, as their vices? There is no reason why we should not, and there is every reason why we should. Our Estate here most probably,

bably, and our Estate hereafter most certainly depends upon our choice. Among the Higher ranks and among the lower too there are doubtless great numbers anxious for the Honor of God. But tho' their virtues may be and must be of essential service to the nation, and tho' for their sakes the day of vengeance may be deferred; yet the progress of vice is so rapid, that the crimes of the wicked may unawares draw it down upon us with accumulated wrath. We have had many deliverances in this Land: God has blessed this nation beyond most, if not any part of the world. Let us not continue to pervert His Blessings. Deliverances from evil are but ill repaid by such ingratitude. Therefore that Virtue and Religion may be re-established universally among us by our Sovereign's Example and Authority, let us all, in thankfulness for this His fresh preservation of us, pray fervently and with one Heart and one Voice. **GOD SAVE THE KING.**

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